

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 8663

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MILI, CB

SUBJECT: STATUS OF AUTO-DEFENSE FORCES

1. SUMMARY. AFTER SOME DELAY CAUSED BY PREOCCUPATION WITH THE ENEMY'S PHNOM PENH OFFENSIVE, FANK HAS NOW SELECTED THE FIFTY KHUMS FOR A MAP-SUPPORTED AUTO-DEFENSE PROGRAM, DESIGNATED AN ADDITIONAL 61 KHUMS TO BE FANK SUPPORTED, INVENTORIED THE EQUIPMENT ALREADY DISTRIBUTED TO THESE UNITS AND DRAWN UP A LIST OF REQUIREMENTS. RELEASE OF U.S. COUNTERPART FUNDS FOR TRAINING AND OTHER LOCAL COSTS AWAITS APPROVAL OF A SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION HELD UP BY POLITICAL RIVALRY AT THE CABINET LEVEL. POL/MIL OFFICERS IN VISITS TO ALL BUT ONE OF THE PROVINCES AND 28 OF THE 50 INDIVIDUAL KHUMS INCLUDED IN THE MAP-SUPPORTED PLAN, FOUND IN MOST CASES MARKED ENTHUSIASM AND INITIATIVE ON THE PART OF BOTH THE VILLAGERS AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP. MANY OF THEM, HOWEVER, SEEM TO BE SEEKING IN AUTO-DEFENSE A MEANS TO EVADE THE BASIC PROBLEM OF PROVIDING MANPOWER TO REGULAR FANK UNITS. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBERATION AND NATION-BUILDING (LENA) CHIEF OF STAFF COLONEL THACH RENG HAS PROVIDED US WITH A LIST

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OF THE FIFTY KHUMS CHOSEN AS PILOT AUTO-DEFENSE PROJECTS.

EMPHASIS HAS FORTUNATELY BEEN PLACED ON THE PROVINCES WHICH HAVE DISPLAYED THE MOST LOCAL INITIATIVE IN AUTO-DEFENSE, WITH EIGHT KHUMS GOING TO PURSAT, SEVEN EACH TO SIEM REAP AND KOMPONG CHHNANG, AND FIVE TO DISTANT ODDAR MEANCHEY. THE OTHERS WERE DIVIDED AMONG SEVEN OTHER PROVINCES INCLUDING 10 KHUMS ON MAJOR ROUTES IN THE PHNOM PENH AREA.

3. THE 50 KHUMS CHOSEN FOR U.S. AUTO-DEFENSE ASSISTANCE HAVE ALREADY ORGANIZED 20,142 DEFENDERS IN 200 SECTIONS OF 36 WEAPONS EACH (MAINTAINING ROUGHLY THE DESIRED RATIO OF THREE MEN TO EACH WEAPON). THESE KHUMS HAVE ALREADY PROCURED 6,192 ARMS AND HAVE BEEN GIVEN 20 PRC-10 RADIOS, LEAVING A DEFICIT OF ABOUT 1,000 RIFLES WHICH CAN BE MET BY CURRENT FANK STOCKS, 270 FM-1 AND 43 FM-5 RADIOS TO BE FURNISHED THROUGH MAP AND 400 FIRST AID KITS TO BE PURCHASED LOCALLY WHEN COUNTERPART FUNDS ARE RELEASED.

4. THE 61 ADDITIONAL KHUMS ALREADY ORGANIZED AND APPROVED FOR FANK BUT NOT MAP SUPPORT ARE CONCENTRATED LARGELY IN SIEM REAP (14), KOMPONG CHHNANG (12) AND THE PHNOM PENH AREA (18). THESE HAVE A TOTAL OF 376 SECTIONS, 36,610 MEN AND JUST OVER 5,000 WEAPONS ALREADY DISTRIBUTED. THE ARMS DEFICIT FOR THESE KHUMS IS SET AT 5,082 RIFLES, ABOUT HALF OF WHICH CAN BE COVERED BY CURRENT FANK STOCKS AND THE REMAINDER OF WHICH IS TO BE GRADUALLY ELIMINATED AS REGULAR UNITS ARE REFITTED WITH M-16S, LIBERATING OLDER MODELS FOR AUTO-DEFENSE (LENA FIGURES ON THE MAP AND NON-MAP AUTO-DEFENSE PROJECT ARE BEING PROVIDED BY AIRGRAM.)

5. BECAUSE THE SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET WHICH INCLUDES AUTO-DEFENSE FUNDS HAS NOT BEEN APPROVED, COUNTERPART FUNDS HAVE NOT BEEN RELEASED TO PERMIT THE PURCHASE OF MEDICAL KITS AND THE FINANCING OF TRAINING FOR AUTO-DEFENSE UNITS. ALTHOUGH OTHER FACTORS ARE INVOLVED, A POLITICAL STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OVER THE AUTO-DEFENSE PROGRAM HAS CERTAINLY FIGURED AMONG THE
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OBSTACLES TO THE SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET. PRIME MINISTER IN TAM AND HIS ALLIES FEEL STRONGLY THAT AUTO-DEFENSE SHOULD NOT BE UNDER THE FANK AND NOW HAVE IN FACT OBTAINED CABINET APPROVAL TO PLACE IT UNDER A REPUBLICAN POLICE FORCE (PHNOM PENH 7504). WE HAVE, HOWEVER, POINTED OUT TO ALL CONCERNED THAT MAP SUPPORT IS CONTINGENT UPON AUTO-DEFENSE REMAINING UNDER FANK'S SUPERVISION AND ARE HOPEFUL THAT ALL WILL

EVENTUALLY ACQUIESCE IN THE CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK.

6. EMBASSY/FANK TEAMS CONDUCTED ON THE SPOT INSPECTIONS OF THE AUTO-DEFENSE PROGRAMS IN ALL PROVINCES BUT KOMPONG SPEU, WHERE DETERIORATION OF THE SECURITY SITUATION FORCED CANCELLATION OF AN INSPECTION TRIP. OF THE SOME 35 KHUMS VISITED 28 WERE CHOSEN FOR THE PILOT PROJECT ALONG WITH 22 OTHERS WHICH WE HOPE TO VISIT LATER. FOLLOWING ARE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THESE INVESTIGATIONS:

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A. WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, VILLAGERS SEEM TO WELCOME THE AUTO-DEFENSE PROGRAM. THE INHABITANTS OF SIEM REAP, SVAY RIENG, KOMPONG CHHNANG AND PURSAT ARE PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS TO GET ARMS. A CHAIN OF AUTO-DEFENSE UNITS NOW EXTENDS UP ROUTE 5 FROM THE CITY OF KOMPONG CHHNANG ALMOST TO THE BATTAMBANG BORDER. INCLUDED AMONG THEM ARE THE FORMERLY OVERRUN LOCALITIES OF PONGRO AND PONLEY, WHERE AUTO-DEFENSE MORALE AND THE SPIRIT OF REVENGE RUN HIGH. EVEN IN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE, WHERE THE AUTHORITIES HAVE DONE VIRTUALLY NOTHING TO POPULARIZE AUTO-DEFENSE, SOME RICH VILLAGES HAVE PURCHASED THEIR OWN WEAPONS.

B. AUTO-DEFENDERS ARE NOW AND WILL REMAIN A MOTLEY GROUP WITH STANDARDIZATION OF EQUIPMENT AND ORGANIZATION NOT REALLY A REALIZABLE GOAL. THEY INCLUDE, IN ADDITION TO RIVE FARMERS, FACTORY WORKERS IN PHNOM PENH'S SUBURG OF TAKHMAU, FISHERMEN ALONG THE TONLE SAP, AND CIVIL SERVANTS AND STUDENTS IN SOME OF THE PROVINCIAL CENTERS. MOST ARE WITHOUT EXPERIENCE BUT THERE IS A LEAVENING OF FORMER POACHERS, KHMER SEREI, FANK DESERTERS, RALLIERS, AND PARTICIPANTS IN SIMILAR SIHANOUK-ERA PROGRAMS. THEIR WEAPONS RUN THE GAMUT FROM 1936 MODEL FRENCH RIFLES AND AL CAPONE-ERA SECRET

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THOMPSON .45 MACHINE GUNS THROUGH SLICK CHINESE-MADE KALASHNIKOV ASSAULT RIFLES AND U.S. M-79 GRENADE LAUNCHERS. AMUNITION SEEMS IN MOST CASES ADEQUATE FOR COMBAT BUT NOT FOR TRAINING.

C. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED THE PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES IN SIEM REAP, KOMPONG CHHNANG AND MOST RECENTLY PURSAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST ACTIVE IN ORGANIZING UNITS, DISTRIBUTING WEAPONS AND LINKING AUTO-DEFENSE VILLAGES WITH NEARBY TERRITORIAL REACTION FORCES. THE ODDAR MEANCHEY AND OUDONG MEANCHEY AUTHORITIES HAVE DONE REASONABLY WELL WITH LESS RESOURCES AND UNDER MORE DIFFICULT CONDITIONS. SVAY RIENG, WHICH AS AN ISOLATED ENCLAVE WITH LITTLE HINTERLAND IS A SPECIAL CASE, SEEMS TO BE SUCCESSFULLY INTEGRATING AUTO-DEFENSE INTO ITS DEFENSE PLANS (AS APPARENTLY IS KOMPONG THOM, WHICH IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE AUTO-DEFENSE PROGRAM.) BY CONTRAST, THE KOMPONG CHAM GOVERNOR HAS TALKED A GOOD AUTO-DEFENSE GAME BUT HAS ONLY ORGANIZED FOUR KHUMS, INCLUDING SOME UNITS WITHIN THE TOWN WHICH DO NOT FIT THE AUTO-DEFENSE CONCEPT. THE BATTAMBANG LEADERSHIP EASILY WINS THE BOOBY PRIZE. THE CHAMCAR SAMRONG PROGRAM, WHICH THE EXHIBITED TO EMBASSY OFFICERS WAS, FOR EXAMPLE, QUITE CLEARLY A PAPER EXERCISE, NO TRAINING WAS UNDERWAY AND LITTLE ORGANIZATION WAS VISIBLE.

7. THE INTEREST SHOWN FOR AUTO-DEFENSE MAY IN GOOD PART STEM FROM THE LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR NATIONAL CONSCRIPTION. THE FARMERS AND VILLAGERS WHO ARE UNWILLING TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES WHO ARE UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO FORCE THEM TO DO SO UNDOUBTEDLY SEE AUTO-DEFENSE AS A MEANS OF DIMINISHING THE NATIONAL NEED TO FIELD A MOBILE ARMY. IN TAKHMAU, FOR EXAMPLE, AUTO-DEFENSE UNITS ARE PROVIDING STATIC DEFENSE FOR BRIDGES OVER THE PREK THNAOT RIVER AT CONSIDERABLE DISTANCE FROM REACTION FORCES. EVEN IN KOMPONG

CHHNANG AND PURSAT THE GOVERNORS SEEMED OVERLY
HOPEFUL THAT SELF-DEFENSE FORCES CAN RELEASE REGULARS

FROM STATIC DEFENSE. THIS ATTITUDE HAS NOT BEEN
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ALTOGETHER DISCOURAGED BY THE GENERAL STAFF, WHICH HAS
BEEN FORCED TO PULL AWAY PROVINCIAL BATTALIONS TO
SUPPLEMENT THE GENERAL RESERVE AND PHNOM PENH'S
DEFENSES. FANK ASST COS FOR OPERATIONS MG HOU HANGSIN,
FOR EXAMPLE, PUBLICLY MENTIONED THE PROVIDING OF
3,000 ARMS FOR AUTO-DEFENSE AS PARTIAL COMPENSATION
FOR REMOVING THE 24TH BRIGADE FROM SVAY RIENG. THERE
IS THUS A REAL DANGER THAT AUTO-DEFENSE UNITS ARE BUR-
GEONING AT THE TIME REACTION FORCES TO PROTECT THEM
ARE DECREASING. WE ARE EMPHASIZING TO LENA AUTHORITIES
THE NEED TO ASSURE A PROPER NUMERICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTO-DEFENSE UNITS AND TERRITORIAL
FORCES.

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